



## Venezuela: October 7 presidential election Bolivarian revolution at stake

On October 7, Venezuelans will go to the polls to elect the president of the country. Nearly 14 years since Hugo Chavez was first elected in 1998, this is a crucial test for Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. In numerous elections and referenda, the overwhelming majority of the Venezuelan people have consistently ratified their support for the wide program of social transformation which has been taking place.

The Bolivarian revolution, which Chavez said should have the aim of achieving "Socialism of the 21st century", has transformed the lives of millions of people, despite the fierce resistance of the country's oligarchy (backed and supported by imperialism).

Using the country's oil wealth in the benefit of the majority, the revolution has created a whole host of social programs (Misiones) attempting to address the needs of the people. The education Misiones have eradicated illiteracy and incorporated

millions of students to all levels of the education system, from pre-school to higher education, including the creating of the brand new Universidad Bolivariana.

The health care Misión Barrio Adentro (into the neighbourhood), has brought free primary health care clinics into the poor barrios (neighbourhoods) of the main cities, staffed by thousands of Cuban doctors. Misión Milagro, a joint project between Venezuelan and Cuba, has provided free eye sight operations to hundreds of thousands of patients, not only in Venezuela, but throughout Latin America and beyond.

Through Mercal and PDVAL, a network of subsidised supermarkets has been created covering the length and breadth of the national geography, providing cheap basic food products to the people.

The Bolivarian revolution is more than a collection of social programs, however important these are. It is an attempt to transform the living conditions

of the majority of the population by giving them the power to run their own lives. Hundreds of thousands of organisations have been created to involve people directly in the running of the distribution of water, land reform, health care, education, etc. As part of this we have seen the emergence of communal councils which are supposed to take control of all aspects of life in the communities in urban and rural areas.

There has been a flourishing of community and alternative media. With government support and backing communities, peasant and workers' organisations have set their own newspapers, radio and TV stations. There has been an effort to democratise access to the media in the face of a monopoly of the mass media by a handful of private groups virulently opposed the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution.

Workers have been emboldened by the Bolivarian revolution to take over factories which had been left idle by its owners and to run them under workers' control and management.

Companies which had been privatised by previous governments have now been renationalised (like telecommunications giant CANTV, steel mills SIDOR, the main cement producers, etc). In the state-owned basic industries in Guayana (aluminium, steel, iron, etc) the workers have been given a say in the running of the companies.

The Bolivarian revolution has

served as an inspiration for millions in Latin America and beyond and has challenged the domination of Washington in the continent.

These achievements have been made in the face of fierce opposition on the part of the oligarchy which ruled the country for many decades, with the support of US imperialism. Ten years ago, in April 2002, they organised a coup which removed the democratically elected president Hugo Chavez. The masses came out on the streets and defeated it in less than 48 hours.

There have been many other undemocratic attempts to smash the Bolivarian revolution and remove Chavez from power (the sabotage of the economy in December 2002, the guarimba campaign of riots in the streets in 2004, election boycotts, bringing foreign paramilitaries into the country, etc).

What is at stake at the October 7th elections is more than a change of president. The Venezuelan masses are acutely aware that if the opposition wins all the social gains which have been achieved will be reversed.

The revolution is by no means completed and this has created a number of problems. President Chavez himself has lashed against the bureaucracy within the Bolivarian movement. There are many obstacles that the revolution must still overcome. A victory for Chavez will not automatically remove them, but a defeat would put all the advances the revolution has achieved in jeopardy.



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# Who really is Capriles Radonski?

The Venezuelan opposition likes to portray its candidate Capriles Radonski as a “centre-left” and even “progressive” contender and a “young politician who has broken with the old guard.” However, his track record, and that of the united opposition coalition (Mesa de Unidad Democrática) which backs him, tell a different story.

Capriles was first elected as a member of the Venezuelan par-

liament in 1998 as part of the Christian Democratic party COPEI, one of the two main parties of the Venezuelan ruling class which had ruled the country for decades sharing political power and wealth.



**Capriles Radonski entering Cuban Embassy**

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COPEI was so discredited that Capriles and others decided to form their own party Primero Justicia. This new party was set up with advice and funding from

the US National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute

During the April 2002 coup against President Chavez, Capriles Radonski was the mayor of Baruta, an upper class municipality in Caracas, where the Cuban embassy is based. Emboldened by the coup, a mob of opposition demonstrators laid siege to the embassy and demanded the right to enter, as they

thought prominent figures from the democratic Bolivarian government were hiding there. Capriles not only did not prevent the violent behaviour of the demonstrators but jumped over the fence of the Cuban embassy, violating diplomatic territory, to attempt to conduct a search himself. He was confronted by the Cuban ambassador and diplomatic staff. When he came out he

told the assembled mob that he had not been able to verify whether spokespersons of the deposed government were in the embassy. This led to further violence, with his municipal police watching, in which the embassy’s electricity and water supply were cut off, windows smashed and diplomatic cars attacked. Capriles also participated in the illegal arrest of the then Minister of Justice Rodriguez Chacín.

The opposition coalition, the mis-named United Democratic Coalition, is composed a whole host of parties, the majority of which participated actively in the April 2002 coup and the sabotage of the economy in December 2002 – February 2003.

Because of the popularity of the government’s social Misiones, the opposition now claims to support them and Capriles Radonski has promised to maintain them if he is elected. But in 2008, when Capriles Radonsky was elected regional governor of the state of Miranda, one of his first actions was to move against the Cuban doctors of Mision Barrio Adentro, expelling them from their homes, closing down some of the local health clinics and removing some of the educational Misiones from the public buildings where they were based. It was only the mass mobilisation of the people to defend them that saved the Misiones in Miranda and other opposition ruled states.

## Some achievements of the Bolivarian revolution

- doubling state spending in education from 3.4% to 7% of GDP
- massive increase in the number of university students (from 780,000 to 2.1 million)
- eradication of illiteracy through Mision Robinson which involved 1.5 million students
- renationalisation of telecommunications, cement, steel and other privatised companies
- reduction of the extreme poverty index from 42% to 7%
- workers’ participation in the management of state-owned companies
- wide ranging plan of agrarian reform to redistribute land to the peasants

The Hands Off Venezuela Campaign is a broad-based campaign, which was established to generate awareness about Venezuela within the labour and trade union movement and among young people. Our main task is to promote the social gains of the Bolivarian Revolution and mobilise public opinion against imperialist aggression towards Venezuela.

The basic aims of the Campaign are to:

**Give full support to the Venezuelan Revolution, which has repeatedly proved its democratic credentials, in its struggle to liberate the oppressed of Venezuela.**

**Defend the Revolution against the attacks of imperialism and its local agents, the Venezuelan oligarchy.**

**To counteract the media distortions and lies about Venezuela and mobilise the maximum support for the above aims.**

Hands Off Venezuela organises public events, film shows, speaking tours, delegations to Venezuela of trade unionists and youth, provides news and information about the latest events and promotes solidarity and links both in Britain and internationally within Venezuela.

Recommended affiliation fees are: National trade unions £500, Regional bodies £250, branches/trades councils £50, individuals £7.50

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